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Source: *Pacific Journal 2* (2007): 57-69.

Publisher: Fresno Pacific University.

Stable URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/11418/368>

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The Church and Women: Power, Participation, and Language in Christian Institutions

HOPE NISLY

In the late twentieth century, the institutional church began to make much-needed, long-overdue progress in the formal inclusion of women in its structure and life. To be sure, women had always been part of church life, but generally with a silent role and/or forced to create their own spheres of influence without official acknowledgment or access to power. Even with recent changes churches, at best, appear ambiguous on issues of inclusion and, at worst, remain misogynist and confining. It is important, therefore, to discuss the role of women in matters of faith, and to ascertain how women have carved out niches within structures that have long marginalized their position and presence. It is equally important to note that despite changes promising fuller inclusion there is ongoing resistance, in both subtle and overt ways.

I grew up in a church (in the Conservative Mennonite Conference) that required women to cover their heads at all times in symbolic submission to the “godly” chain of authority. The order was explicit and clear: God, Jesus Christ, man, woman. By the time I was an adolescent several things were apparent: First, the rules of my church had the greatest impact on women and they were a burden despite assurances that these strictures were actually a protection for females, denoting respect and honor. Furthermore, I noticed that there were women around me who seemed at least as competent as the male leaders, yet their participation in official church business was restricted. They could teach other women or they could present an essay at the Sunday evening service. In the main worship service on Sunday morning, however, women could speak only few words of testimony. The scenario referenced was from a different time and place, and there are significant differences between that and twenty-first century church practice. Yet today, when I sit with female colleagues from church institutions and churches (even ones that ordain women and hire them for management positions) I continue to hear about struggles to be heard on an equal basis with male colleagues, about being scrutinized and held to more rigid standards than men, and of the difficulty in finding and retaining positions. I hear from women whose institutional evaluations include comments on their style of clothing

along with actual performance assessment. I observe churches that make a distinction in whether women can be associate pastors or lead pastors.¹

To be sure, the landscape differs from my Sunday morning experiences and observations at age thirteen. Church organizations have women in some upper-management positions. A few churches ordain women without major debate. There is the occasional church or denomination that encourages speaking of God in images that are not solely male. There may even be denominations where the “mommy wars” are not perpetuated in the name of God and the Bible, and where women find support for whatever decision they make regarding home and career.

The fact that these things have to be acknowledged, however, indicates the tenuous nature of the progress toward full inclusion. In addition, there has been a retrenchment of positioning that makes it necessary to continue to discuss the topic. After all, we have no need to discuss the query: “Has the church been good for men?” That question has a quality that renders it irrelevant.

So the debate churns on over ordination, women’s roles in home and church, and whether one can conceive of God as anything other than “he.” The church enters these debates with too little sense of history, with scant knowledge of the construction of gender roles and how they have limited women’s lives with the explicit guidance and sanction of the church.

Even so, women in the churches (usually at the margins, and prior to institutionalization) have found ways to participate. They have seldom done this without opposition, but nevertheless, they have done it. Does that mean that the church has been “good for women?” I have to reiterate that the institutional church has not been good for women unless one considers the church at its origin and the churches at the margins. It is there where change happens and where, yes, the church can be good for women.

The issues, if they can be sorted out at all, are many. Is it about women in leadership? Is it about how we speak of God? Is it how we understand gender roles at any level of society and church? Is it how we view female (and male) sexuality? Is it about more than access to power—i.e. how are the daily lives of women impacted by church decisions and mandates? Why is violence against women as prevalent within the church as without? Finally, how do we tell the stories of the church in ways that reflect lived experience alongside ideological mandates?

When Mary spoke to the angel saying, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word,” (Luke 1:38) she exhibited readi-

ness to take her place in the community. A Jewish woman with few temple rights who was in the uncomfortable position of an inexplicable pregnancy, she was willing, nevertheless, to assume a public role. As a prophet, Mary “went with haste” to Elizabeth, who recognized in her a woman with a vital part in a larger plan, embodying the best of their tradition.

The lyrics of Mary’s song foresaw a shift in power that her son would soon portray. Her words illustrate the potent impact faith can have on the lives of those who live (as Mary did) at the margins of society. The power to which she referred would bring, “down the powerful from their thrones, and lift up the lowly.” This power would not entrench itself in maintenance of the status quo, but rather allow each person to find his or her own place, regardless of social status.

In the ensuing development of Western civilization, the story of women’s participation in the church followed a circuitous path, one that too often reflected societal fears and ambiguities regarding women’s sexuality. Yet, the impact of Jesus’ model of an “upside down” power ran deep, surfacing in unusual places and potent ways. Women, along with other marginal groups, saw in Jesus’ life a call to ministry in many ways, while the institutional church generally limited them.

Authentic faith, however, can not be suppressed indefinitely. Despite wounds of exclusion, being burned as witches, or banished simply for being outspoken, and within an overwhelmingly patriarchal structure, women (and at times, a few men around them) searched for the ideal of the early Jesus movement. The church marginalized women (and other groups) and the subsequent historical record eliminated their stories.

I will highlight a few examples where women played an important role in the life of the church in the Western tradition. These are the exceptions to the rule, but it is in the exceptions where hope resides. I have chosen only two examples, with the acknowledgement that I have omitted major parts of the world and other eras for lack of space. In addition, I chose to look only at women in the Christian tradition and not to compare their experiences to that of women in other cultures and religions. It is a worthy study to determine why the historic treatment of women is poor among all world religions.² However, I ask that those of us who are Christians hold ourselves to our own best standard as set by our own Scripture and prophetic voices. This article looks at the ideal set by Jesus and his early followers, highlights several places where women took active roles in church life, and discusses implications for the twenty-first century church.

Each story is fraught with the complexity of human experience. We are, of course, affected by more than faith. Faith is always informed by societal mores, political institutions, economic structures, and more. In most cases, women anchored change within the predominant patriarchal rhetoric and structure. The cultural and ecclesiastical establishment prohibited a radical deviation from the norm even when (as with Anabaptists) people were discarding the prevailing foundations in favor of one determined to be more purely New Testament in structure. When women assumed different roles but acquiesced to cultural rhetoric, analysis is challenging. For the purpose of this article, I note simply that women altered their roles at great cost and with enormous effort.

Searching church history for women's contributions involves uncovering obscure names, revealing forgotten stories, and developing alternative frameworks of history and theology. The recovery of women's voices illuminates some of the best of Christian tradition, for it is in lives on the margin where we find the powerful impact of authentic biblical Christianity. The story of the progress of the church is uneven, even painful. Nevertheless, it is the story of the possibility of redemption, in the re-creation of Jesus' ideal where the church is willing to listen to the people on the edges and all voices are incorporated into church dialogue on any given issue.

Women in the Early Jesus Movement

With biblical roots, the Christian church has viewed itself as a place of redemption, where hurting people can turn for healing and hope. At its best, the church has served as a sanctuary from injustice. For all the times when the church has used the Bible to justify injustice (slavery, subjugation of women, warding off peasant revolts), there are those places where it has turned to its roots in the life of Jesus and elicited the best of its possibilities. For good and for bad, Christianity has affected the everyday lives of people, hidden beneath a broader structure of race, ethnicity, class, and gender.

The biblical record reveals the depth and breadth of the possibility of the difference Christianity can make. Jesus modeled and voiced a new life of egalitarianism with full participation by everyone in the society. For the most part, Jesus never spoke directly to the subject of women's roles, yet his actions provide an ample and eloquent example of an alternative way of living.

In the first-century society under Roman rule, life was difficult for peasants and small farmers. The imperial system nearly destroyed community and family structures. There were ethnic and class tensions. Roman officials

disdained the Jewish people, seeing them as fit only to be Roman subjects or slaves. It was a world lacking in individual dignity and justice.³ Into this chaos came Jesus with an alternative worldview.

At the intersection of Roman, Greek, and Hebrew worlds, core values included honor and shame, lack of individual identity, and purity laws with a “place” for everything, including women. In ideology (although not always in practice) women’s identity rested with the men in their lives. In theory, they could bring honor or shame on their household without deserving honor.⁴ Lived experience, however, does not always reflect ideology, and despite being restricted in their rights to speak theology and enter parts of the synagogue, women of the time were elders and prophets and leaders.⁵

Alongside this reality of women as elders and leaders, there was an ongoing debate regarding the appropriateness of women taking part in public worship. Jesus and his earliest followers, however, emphasized right relationships and community, advocating for an inclusive and egalitarian society and family. Warren Carter speaks of the Gospel as a “counternarrative, a work of resistance.”⁶ This “counternarrative” extended to the role of women. The community Jesus modeled embraced new gender roles as well as economic and political ones. In fulfilling the best of his own Jewish tradition, Jesus provided an alternate emphasis on healing, hope, and inclusion of the marginalized. He called women into service for him, listened to them, and offered respect even when they disagreed with him.

In his preaching, Jesus used examples from the lives of women and employed images that come from women’s experiences of life. These were no small things in this society where gender roles were clearly delineated and where women’s virtues centered on the private sphere and included obedience, silence, and chastity while men’s were public and based on courage and honor.⁷

In the twentieth century, lay theologian and Christian apologist, Dorothy Sayers wrote:

Perhaps it is no small wonder that the women were the first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this man—there never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronised; ... who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them . . . ; There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole gospel that borrows its pungency from female perversity . . . ⁸

In other words, Jesus granted women dignity they had not known. There was no talk of submission. He called everyone alike to life in a new community where people respected and served each other. He expected everyone to live with love and to lead with justice. Ultimately, the political and social implications of this message, which would turn power on its head, led to his death.

In the early church, there is a mixed presentation of women's roles. This has led to tension in the church throughout the centuries. Paul supported women's leadership in church and society, but he also spoke about a subordinate role for women. One passage that subsequent generations interpreted to mean that women are to be subject to men (I Corinthians 11), also contains the suggestion that women can prophesy (v. 5) and issues a call for mutual submission (v.11). Amy-Jill Levine suggests that the problem may be less about the misogyny of Paul and more related to issues of interpretation.⁹

The prevailing societal structure informed Paul and his contemporaries. And yet in the world of early Christianity, roles within the early church were based on faith rather than gender, in line with Jesus' teaching. It was a radical statement (Gal. 3:28) to say that in this emerging movement that there was no longer Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. This passage was a key to the early church's understanding of itself.¹⁰ Female converts helped build the church, with Paul calling them his co-workers, referring to them as apostles and prophets. However, Paul's writings also reflect "injunctions of a patriarchal reaction which, on theological grounds, decree the subordinate role of women."¹¹

Alongside the message of subordination, the early church provides examples of women in leadership. Lydia, the "seller of purple," was a wealthy business woman. She asked to be baptized, then became a leader in the church. Lydia opened her home to meetings and led new believers in an exploration of the implications of Jesus' words. Paul spent time in her home and Lydia used her wealth and influence, to support his missionary work.¹²

Priscilla also opened her home to the community of gathering believers. She and her husband taught Apollos regarding the resurrection and meaning of Jesus' death. Wahlberg likened this to someone informing Billy Graham that he had a flawed understanding of the Gospel.¹³

The question is always how we interpret the New Testament, as well as how we remember history. It makes a difference whether we emphasize Paul's radically new model of peoplehood in Galatians or stop with his words of subordination and submission. Georgia Harkness notes, "The first of these two sides of the paradox has been largely overlooked, while the

second has been very influential through the centuries in keeping women in subordination to men in both church and society.”¹⁴

Paul caught the vision of new possibilities, but he was still a product of his time and place. The women of the early church lived within the reality of this paradox, but saw a new vision. Interpretation of the texts continued to reflect the patriarchy that Jesus opposed. Then as the first generations of the church struggled for survival, along with recognition and credibility, the process of institutionalization led it into forcing women out of roles of leadership.¹⁵ It even debated the words that were acceptable regarding the image of God, leading away from the feminine (Sophia) and toward the masculine (Word.)¹⁶

It is Jesus’ vision to which we return when we record and interpret Christian history, where the Spirit is given to all (Acts 2:17); where there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28); where we heed Mary’s song (Luke 2:52) and turn power upside-down.

Anabaptist Women

The paradox of Paul’s words continued to manifest itself throughout the following millennia of church history, often with the church choosing to follow the Pauline proclamations for women to keep silence. There were exceptions, however, when parts of the church followed a different path. Too often the recording of history has minimized or omitted those exceptions to the rule. Recovering Jesus’ ideal for women is, therefore, more than a theological issue; it is also about the re-telling of our past.

The Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century provides one glimpse of an alternative view of women’s place. The names of many martyrs are familiar. What descendent of the Anabaptists does not know that Felix Manz was the first martyr drowned in the Limmat River? On the other hand, Anneken Heyndricks, Maria of Monjou, Anna of Freiburg, and Margarete Preuss are less recognizable, even though *The Martyr’s Mirror* relates the stories of these women, and many others, alongside the men. In the conclusion to the accounts of martyrs of the sixteenth century, the writer states, “We have presented to you, kind reader, many beautiful examples of men, women, youths and maidens, who faithfully followed their Saviour, Christ Jesus, in the true faith, feared God from the inmost of their soul, and with a pure heart sought eternal life...”¹⁷

For Anabaptists, the place of a martyr was one of honor. Anabaptist women left their families and followed the directives of their new-found

faith to their deaths. They gave their testimonies, printed and distributed the movement's ideals, and ultimately, died for their faith alongside the men. While they did not openly challenging the principle of male leadership, they followed their consciences. The call to discipleship superseded even the call to care for their families. Placing Christ first, led them to the highest show of Christian commitment—martyrdom.¹⁸

The prophetic voice of the Anabaptist movement espoused discipleship and the “priesthood of all believers,” positions derived from reading the Bible and attempting to return to a New Testament model of the church. These women and men took their new-found theology seriously, leading them to places where practice diverged from cultural and spiritual norms of the time. In order to follow this call to radical discipleship, Anabaptist women had to study Scripture and theology thoroughly. When it came time to stand before the judges who questioned their faith, they spoke with conviction and clarity.

As is often the case, the ideas on women's roles varied. Menno Simons commanded women to be obedient and prescribed subordinate roles for them. Dirk Phillips, however, was critical of reformers for omitting women from their teaching. From prison, Jerome Segers wrote a letter to his wife, Lijsken, in which he declared, “And though they tell you to attend to your sewing, this does not hinder us; for Christ called us all, and commanded us to search the scriptures . . .”¹⁹

As Anabaptists recaptured a New Testament ideal for the church, women spoke freely and condemningly to their captors. They were teachers in the movement, they printed and disseminated Anabaptist materials, and they established congregations. With Jesus as their model, the theology was egalitarian. Martyrdom was an honor accorded to women as well as to men.

Slave Women in the United States

The experience of slave women in the United States provides another historical example of women's involvement in the church. Born into slavery, denied even the right to raise their children and establish families, black women created communities founded on faith and rooted in the churches. Isabella Van Wageningen was one such woman. An illiterate slave woman who was forced to marry only to have her children sold away from her, Isabella became a compelling preacher whose sermons combined calls to Christ with abolition and women's suffrage. She boldly preached her message to everyone, changing her name to Sojourner Truth to reflect her journey and mission.

Black women from the time of slavery onward were spiritual leaders within their churches. They preached and wrote, often combining their ministries with abolition, civil rights, and women's suffrage. Despite debates on the roles women should play, individual congregations of many denominations often supported and encouraged the women to follow their callings. Mission, leadership, and ministry were often a flawless part of social rights movements.

Sojourner Truth, whose spiritual revelation led her to become a compelling preacher of salvation and abolition, is well known, but she was not alone. Maria Stewart was another minister who spoke for the rights of black women and openly criticized male clergy. Slave women such as Mother Suma and Aunt Hester preached and converted, even among their owners. Jarena Lee, the first female preacher in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, received the endorsement of the bishop, but was refused a formal pastorate and became an itinerant evangelist. Still others went to the mission field through their churches.²⁰

Within restrictions, they did the work of the church for which they often were excoriated. For black women in ministry, there was always an additional restriction. The African-American church was the one place where black men exerted influence. Women frequently held themselves back to allow men the power they lacked elsewhere.

Despite obstacles, slave women paved the way for women who became ministers, evangelists, and theologians after them. They drew on their African traditions and images of God, incorporated Christian beliefs, worked within their particular context of slavery and violence to create a religious tradition of unbounded strength and hope.

Where Do We Go From Here?

The stories of the power exerted by Christianity in women's lives lies in the lives of many women. Throughout the centuries, women found many ways to carve out their own worlds, to participate in the life of the church, to form their own spiritual traditions. From mystics such as Jane Lead to twentieth century Mennonite Brethren missionary Paulina Foote; from Joan of Arc to Simone Weil to Pentecostal women ministers in the early years of the movement; from Quaker abolitionists to Catholic lay leaders such as Dorothy Day; women laid claim to the power of the Gospel. We know some of these women, others are hidden in history.

Paulina Foote, a Mennonite Brethren missionary to China, wrote in her memoirs, "What a surprise to me when Elder Foth in his sermon at the or-

dination proved with Scripture passages that women should preach.” Foth used the biblical example of Mary Magdalene being the first at the cross and the first to “tell the greatest story of all stories” of the resurrection.²¹ Foote provides a moving description of her own internal debates regarding the implications of being a single woman in ministry.

Within the revival movements, men such as John Wesley and Charles Grandison Finney granted women the right to speak when the spirit moved. Finney wrote, “...I urged females both to pray and speak if they felt deeply enough to do it, and not to be restrained from it by the fact that they were females...”²²

In societies that did not allow women to speak authoritatively in mixed groups, women found their own ways to take part. That usually meant they could become missionaries (like Foote) or join a new Christian sect. It was in new sects, particularly ones with holiness-style inclinations, where women could speak in public. However, as these groups moved into the mainstream, the institutionalizing process forced women into a role that prescribed “silence in public.”²³

There is a common thread in these stories, as disparate as they might be in time, place, and social orientation. First, inclusion of women occurred at the margins of church and society, in emerging sects or in outcasts from the mainstream. The most noticeable moments of inclusion happened at times when the church was in unusual circumstances and needed a broader pool of leaders (such as the Anabaptists or the slave churches.) Generally, people continued to employ the prevailing rhetoric of subordination. Finally, when the group moved toward the mainstream in an effort for recognition and/or survival, the church forced women out of leadership roles. So what does this say to us?

In June 2006, the Presbyterian Church USA approved a document on the Trinity, in which the writers affirmed traditional language (God as Father, Son, Holy spirit) while expanding the image to embrace the full mystery of God. Traditional language, they noted, served to uphold a view of God as male and women as subordinate. “Faced with the alternatives of never speaking of the Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and only speaking of the Trinity as Father, Son and, Holy Spirit, we see a way that is more consistent with the scriptures and theological and liturgical tradition.”²⁴

This document came to my attention through an editorial in a local newspaper. The writer, syndicated columnist Kathleen Parker, believed that the document reduced church beliefs to a “sorta-holy trinity.” She went on to state, “What’s wrong is that we live in anti-father, mad-at-daddy times,”

and she reduced the document to a polarized “women good, men bad” dichotomy.²⁵

How can one respond when our society reduces many things to polar extremes? When we allow this kind of reduction of concerns we miss so much, just as this columnist missed the affirmation of traditional language and imagery upheld by the document. The writers of that document recognized the futility of polarization and called their church to greater faithfulness. That is the best of a Jesus-based faith, a move away from our tendency to see everything as “either-or.” So how does this illustration involving trinitarian language inform the church? Before we can address any issue facing the church, it is important to learn to sidestep polarization. Then we can look at areas of concerns such as women in leadership and women’s economic issues of work and pay. We should reconsider how we discuss topics such as abortion and parenthood, and we can speak candidly about violence against women. We might consider and analyze ongoing resistance to expanding the language and imagery about God.

There has been some progress. Ordination of women is more common. Women have expanded work opportunities. People are more aware of language and how it undergirds our understanding of women’s roles. Even so, there continues to be resistance to women in full leadership roles. A glass ceiling continues to exist, while women and children make up the largest portion of the working poor, and “mommy wars” needlessly pit work-for-pay women against stay-at-home moms. Violence against women is as prevalent as ever and the church is hesitant to address this reality. Many continue to resist the idea that language both reflects and perpetuates societal attitudes.

The best, most biblically authentic agenda for the church will gather the voices of all the marginalized: women, people of color/non-western cultures, those who are not heterosexual, and the poor. These voices are the ones with much to offer to the church precisely because they have experienced the pain of isolation, disenfranchisement, and suffering. It is in this effort that the church gives its best.

The church must not make a few gains and then halt. With each step forward, it must analyze candidly (facing the discomfort this elicits) its own power structures for gaps and weaknesses. It must compare itself to its own best traditions and prophetic voices. It must examine the past and uncover hidden stories, while formulating future goals.

The church should examine its sermons, its literature, its history-telling. It should analyze library collections, scrutinize its language. Church colleges and universities should train youth to understand power and privilege in gen-

der, race, and class, striving to determine “what would Jesus really do.” The theology of submission might be seen as non-hierarchical in the best biblical model.

In the end, there are more questions than answers. That is, I believe, how it should be. It is only in continuing to ask the pertinent questions (despite resistance) that we will make any progress. The particulars of how the church accomplishes this lies in the individuals, the denominations, and the church institutions that make up its core, as we learn to talk to each other through the screens of our differences.

NOTES

¹ Barbara Brown Zikmund et al., *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1998) is one study that supports this anecdotal evidence.

² See for example, Joan Chittister, “Religions Have Some Repenting to Do,” *National Catholic Reporter*, <http://www.nationalcatholicreporter.org/fwis/fw031104.htm>.

³ Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 46-50.

⁴ Ross Saunders, *Outrageous Women, Outrageous God* (Alexandria, Australia: E.J. Dwyer, 1996), 4-20.

⁵ Karen Torjesen, *When Women were Priests* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco), 19-26.

⁶ Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations*, 53.

⁷ Torjesen, *When Women were Priests*, 115.

⁸ Dorothy Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co.), 47.

⁹ Amy-Jill Levine, *A Feminist Companion to Paul* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 1.

¹⁰ Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 199.

¹¹ Rosemary Radford Reuther and Eleanor McLaughlin, *Women of Spirit* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 37.

¹² Rachel Wahlberg, *Jesus and the Freedwoman* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 130-144.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁴ Georgia Harkness, “Women in Church and Society,” in *Women of Spirit*, ed. Rosemary Reuther and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 62.

¹⁵ Karen Torjesen, *When Women were Priests*, 38.

¹⁶ Leo Lefebvre, “The Wisdom of God: Sophia and Christian Theology,” *Christian Century*, Oct. 19, 1994, 951; Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1997).

¹⁷ Thielemann J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyr’s Mirror* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1950), 1098.

¹⁸ Lois Barrett, “The Role and Influence of Anabaptist Women in the Martyr Story,” *Brethren Life and Thought*, Spring 1992, 87.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁰ Delores C. Carpenter, “Black Women in Religious Institutions,” *The Journal of Religious Thought* 46:2 (Winter 1989/Spring 1990): 7.

²¹ Paulina Foote, *God’s Hand Over My Nineteen Years in China* (Hillsboro: M.B. Publishing House, 1962), 26.

²² Nancy Hardesty et al., “Women in the Holiness Movement,” in *Women of Spirit*, ed. Rosemary Reuther and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 230.

²³ Barbara Brown Zikmund et al., *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 12-15.

²⁴ Presbyterian Church USA, “The Trinity: God’s Love Overflowing,” <http://www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/issues/trinityfinal.pdf>.

²⁵ Kathleen Parker, “Church Beliefs Should be More Solid,” *Fresno Bee*, July 5, 2006, Local & State section.